

CSCE NEWS RELEASE

Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe

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Helsinki Commission Efforts Reflected in Istanbul Charter

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Washington, DC—"As Chairman of the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, I am particularly pleased that the Istanbul Charter and Declaration approved by the 54 participating States of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) today, includes a number of specific initiatives advanced by the Commission. They address trafficking in human beings, particularly women and children; corruption; eradication of torture; and protection of Roma. Members of the Commission had been fighting for advancements on these pressing issues for several years," said Commission Chairman Rep. Christopher H. Smith (R-NJ). A 17-member U.S. delegation to the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly in July in St. Petersburg, Russia, paved the way for these advances by building a wider and stronger consensus for them. The Istanbul Declaration suggests some progress on Chechnya, another issue to which the Commission has given priority. But questions remain whether Russia is really interested in finding a political solution.

With regard to Chechnya, Chairman Smith calls on Russia to "cease immediately and without precondition its use of massive and indiscriminate force against civilians. The use of such force has led to an enormous humanitarian tragedy, one that every day looks more comparable in humanitarian destruction to the terror that Serbian leader Milosevic unleashed on the civilians of Kosovo. Those in Chechnya responsible for the scores who have been kidnaped or unaccounted for should immediately release the victims and provide an accounting for all who are missing."

"Although Russia made promises in Istanbul about seeking a political solution to the conflict in Chechnya and allowing the OSCE to play a role in this," Smith continued. "Early post-Summit reports from Moscow suggest the sincerity of these pledges is already in doubt. According to press reports, senior figures in Moscow refer to President Yeltsin's 'rigid' position in Istanbul and say 'no new

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The Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe by law monitors and encourages progress in implementing the provisions of the Helsinki Accords. The Commission, created in 1976, is made up of nine Senators, nine Representatives and one official each from the Departments of State, Commerce and Defense. For more information about the Commission, please call (202) 225-1901.

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orders' have been given. Russia should make a good faith effort to find a political solution, with assistance from the OSCE. Not to do so and to continue Moscow's brutal attacks would condemn many thousands more innocent people to tragic consequences."

"I was disappointed that the documents do not build on OSCE commitments in the field of religious liberty at a time when there is increasing intolerance toward minority faith communities in much of the OSCE region, including Western Europe," Smith continued, "Similarly, I am disheartened at the failure of efforts to set a standard for the removal of criminal defamation from the law books of OSCE States. Such an effort was seen as unacceptable by several countries. But we will not retreat."

Members of the Commission have been particularly active in supporting concrete steps to combat trafficking of human beings, the subject of a June 28 hearing. The U.S. Delegation to the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly in St. Petersburg, Russia, in July introduced an anti-trafficking initiative that was unanimously approved by the Assembly. The introduction of this issue into the Istanbul Charter and Declaration also has been received with broad approval, which will help spur serious efforts in the OSCE States to stop this modern form of slavery. Commission Co-Chairman Sen. Ben Nighthorse Campbell (R-CO) especially welcomed the high-level recognition of the problems posed by corruption in the OSCE region. "Corruption has implications well beyond the economic dimension, undermining the core OSCE values of democracy, human rights and the rule of law. Rampant corruption in many of the economies in transition pose a great threat to their ability to develop as democracies and create prosperous private market economies. These problems likewise afflict the United States and other advanced countries. Thus this issue is ripe for a much higher level of international attention. I would add that corruption has cost U.S. business firms billions of dollars in lost contracts abroad with direct implications for our economy here at home. The comprehensive nature and membership of the OSCE make it ideally suited to play a leading role in combating corruption in a region of vital interest to the United States," Campbell concluded.

Campbell served as Vice-Chairman of the U.S. Delegation to the St. Petersburg Assembly and spearheaded calls for the OSCE to play an active role in combating corruption and organized crime. A Commission hearing in July on "Corruption and Bribery in the OSCE Region" highlighted the multi-dimensional aspects of the problem.

The Commission has conducted hearings this year on the use of torture in countries of the OSCE, especially in Turkey, a NATO ally. Efforts by several Members of the Commission to stop the export of torture equipment by U.S. companies to Turkey's Government followed a 1998 congressional fact-finding mission to Turkey which included interaction with families of torture victims, and a March

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hearing.

In many OSCE participating States, safeguards—such as due process of law and independent judicial oversight of police and security forces—to prevent torture and prosecute and punish those responsible are weak or non-existent. Abuses of prisoners and detainees occur with alarming frequency throughout the NIS; arrest of those responsible is rare. Last year, Russia's Human Rights Ombudsman reported that torture was widespread. In Uzbekistan, political activists and religious believers have been tortured in custody, to extract confessions. In Tajikistan and Turkmenistan, oppositionists have been targets for similar abuse. In Central Europe and the former Yugoslavia, there have been many incidents of police brutality against Roma. Torture is widespread in Turkey, but Ankara's recently stated policy of zero tolerance and their plans for additional legal reforms and human rights education are welcomed. Some 400,000 victims of torture worldwide have made their way to the United States, recognized as a global leader in supporting the rehabilitation of victims of torture.

The November 19 Charter for European Security includes a clear commitment of OSCE states to eradicate torture and other cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment. The Heads of State have further pledged to promote legislation to provide safeguards and legal remedies to combat torture and assist victims.

Members of the Commission hoped to expand the language to further protect minority religious believers, many of whom are currently under legal attack in a number of the OSCE States. Evangelical and Pentecostal Protestants, for example, are having a difficult time in much of the former Soviet Union and in countries like France and Austria in obtaining legal standing in the courts, and in buying property. The bulldozing of the only Seventh Day Adventist church in Turkmenistan last weekend is a shocking reminder of the frightening threats to religious freedom in some areas of the OSCE region.

Summit leaders acknowledged that Roma are subjected to violence and discrimination, as well as other manifestations of racism. There is no clearer manifestation of the racism Roma face than the wall recently erected in the Czech city of Usti nad Labem. The United States has commended the Czech Government and Parliament for opposing the wall, which is incompatible with a democratic society. This wall deserves the same fate as the Berlin wall, and now. A number of countries have no comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation, and Roma have often faced unremedied discrimination in the workplace, housing, education, the military, and public places. Therefore, in addition to acknowledging the violence and discrimination Roma face, the November 19 Declaration calls for the adoption of anti-discrimination legislation to promote respect for the rights of Roma.

The Commission will actively work to build on the progress at the Summit to add impulse and content to the work of the OSCE on the issues of on trafficking, corruption, torture, and Roma. The

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Commission will also make stronger efforts to develop more support among OSCE states for expanding protections to minority religions and faiths, and bringing an end to the infamous criminal defamation laws that, in some countries, are used to squelch voices of freedom. Members of the Commission do not underestimate the exertions required to achieve these goals. In this regard it especially looks forward to close cooperation with NGOs and other OSCE states that shared the Commission's priorities.